

A sequence of lenses

was Steven Holl's vision for his extension to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. The Bloch Building, adjacent to the existing neo-classical museum, consists of five glass plenums – essentially lightwells that draw daylight into the galleries below, although at night they are more like light boxes.

Holl was clear that he wanted to create a contrast with the temple-on-the-hill style of museum. Because of



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the dominance of the existing 1933 building, often held up as a landmark for Kansas, there was a desire not to create an object. The building is partly submerged and folds in and out of the landscape and sculpture garden. "We envisioned a new paradigm fusing landscape and architecture," says Holl. "The visitor's experience will be newly charged with views and partial views of landscape."

The museum required further space for its expanding collection along with academic and community facilities. "This isn't boosterism at work or building for civic ego," says museum director Marc Wilson. "This is a building designed for specific functions, it's about creating a place where people can connect with art. I don't believe in flexibility."

The white plenums punctuating

the lawn are crucial to this ordered design, something that both the architect and client believe is a significant departure for a museum. Visitors to the spaces below will be able to see the changing patterns and luminosity of the sky. The rooms and galleries connecting the plenums, which also serve as cafe and library spaces, are supplemented by controlled lighting.

The passage through the building

is intended to be a seamless journey with subtle kinks, in contrast to the formality of the original museum. For Holl, it is here that the essence of the project lies: "Through the free movement threaded between the light-gathering lenses of the new addition are the elemental connections between ourselves and architecture." **BEATRICE GALILEE**

www.nelson-atkins.org



This picture: The extension is a series of connected light boxes, with the galleries partially sunk into the earth